2464 Palace of Imagination  
  
Sunny remained silent for a while, contemplating, then said slowly:  
  
"Unless… Mirage wasn't the one who created this city at all."  
  
Effie gave him a dubious look.  
  
"If not the great and terrible Demon of Imagination, then who? This place is literally called Mirage City, for Spell's sake."  
  
Sunny shook his head.  
  
"Think about it. Mirage might have created Bastion — both its true and illusory versions — but that is not all Bastion is. It has been taken by the Spell and turned into a Citadel… a Great Citadel, no less. So, just like with other Citadels, the Spell would have taken what made this place special and given its master a way to use it. Turning it into a Component."  
  
Effie wrinkled her nose.  
  
"I don't follow. Are you saying that I, the current master of Bastion, created Mirage City?"  
  
Sunny shook his head again.  
  
"No, I don't think that it was you. I think that someone has co-opted that Component of Bastion and created Mirage City in your stead."  
  
He hesitated for a few moments, then added:  
  
"Naturally, we don't know a lot about the Demon of Imagination. However, we know that her powers had to do with fantasies, illusions, and fanciful things — like fairytale castles rising from the clouds reflected on the surface of water. And that her hobbies included creating lakes and tinkering with mirrors."  
  
Sunny smiled faintly.  
  
"So, what would be hidden in the heart of her cloud castle? A awful weapon? A prison for eerie beings from the reflections? No. I think that this place — this dreadful city imprisoning millions of Others… is a playground."  
  
Effie laughed.  
  
"Wait, a playground? First a toy room, now a playground... is this your weird way of making up for a dull childhood?"  
  
Sunny scoffed.  
  
"I wish. No… but I do think that this place, the Palace of Imagination, is created to be a playground of sorts. A realm where anything Mirage imagined would become reality — just like the illusory Bastion, only devoid of permanence, capable of changing according to her every whim. Complete with beings to populate that reality and play whatever roles she wanted them to. After all, the only thing the Demon of Imagination could not create was living beings — that was something only the gods could do. Well, and Nether."  
  
Effie leaned back and frowned.  
  
"But… the Demon of Imagination is gone, and this playground of hers was turned into a Component of Bastion by the Nightmare Spell, thus allowing Awakened to control it."  
  
Sunny nodded. "Only the original masters of Bastion — Warden and Anvil — never discovered the Mirror Maze, and never made it to the Palace of Imagination. Instead, someone else slipped his way here, and made this place his."  
  
Effie's frown deepened.  
  
"...Mordret."  
  
Her tone was not at all enthused. In fact, Sunny had rarely heard his easygoing friend sound so somber.  
  
He was not too happy, either.  
  
"It was either him or Morgan. Had to be. I don't know whether they created this city consciously or if the Great Mirror simply extracted the blueprint from their subconscious, but it was definitely one of them."  
  
Effie blinked а couple of times.  
  
"Right. Morgan is also here, but we have no idea where either of them is…"  
  
Sunny smirked.  
  
"Says who? Actually, I have already located both Morgan and Mordret. Oh, I also found Saint while I was at it."  
  
Effie blinked a few times.  
  
"When did you… actually, never mind. Wow, Shadow Boy! You really do work fast. So fast, in fact, that it makes me wonder if you're as quick in…"  
  
Sunny gave her chair a kick under the table, winced at the pain in his mundane foot, and said:  
  
"Mordret is the young CEO of the Valor Group… which is a private conglomerate that basically controls the city. The politicians, the courts, the police — pretty much everyone is in their pocket, so he is all but untouchable."  
  
Effie raised her eyebrows.  
  
"What? How is that even possible? I mean… a private company having more power than the government, let alone the people? That sounds completely implausible, does it not?"  
  
Sunny shrugged.  
  
"Sure, sounds far-fetched. But we are in an imaginary realm, remember? It's only reasonable that some things here will be entirely fantastical, not at all based in reality."  
  
He wasn't sure how things worked before the Dark Times, but a society completely ruled by money and private interest seemed like too irrational a concept to have existed — human greed was boundless, after all, so who in their right mind would base a world order around that?  
  
Imagining what would happen to the world if Aiko was in charge, Sunny was suddenly covered in cold sweat.  
  
'By the dead gods. Let's hope that she never becomes a Sovereign…'  
  
He smiled weakly and shook his head.  
  
"Well, think about the Great Clans. Could the government, let alone the people, have done anything against them? No. In that sense, the Valor Group is not that different from the Great Clan Valor."  
  
Sunny sighed.  
  
"Saint has become a hotshot psychiatrist in an elite, high-security mental hospital. While Morgan… Morgan is a patient in that hospital."  
  
Effie looked at him in surprise.  
  
"What? Morgan is in a insane house?"  
  
He nodded.  
  
"Yes. I saw her myself… actually, she told me to find you. It was just that I had no idea who you were when she did."  
  
Effie frowned.  
  
"Morgan knew who she was, too? That makes two of us who weren't brainwashed by this place, and one of you who was. What makes you different? No, wait… why did she tell you to find me? How did she even know that I am here with you?"  
  
Sunny remained silent for a little while, then shook his head.  
  
"I don't know why you two weren't affected by Mirage City. As for the rest… I don't think Morgan knew that you were here. She told me to find you for a reason, though.Think about it… how did I regain my senses?"  
  
Effie blinked a couple of times.  
  
"Well. We roughed those thugs up, then you just sort of did? After I told you to snap out of it."  
  
Sunny nodded again.  
  
"Indeed. You touched me and told me to snap out of it. And I did. I don't think it was a coincidence, either — rather, I think that you have some authority here as the master of Bastion. That was why Morgan told me to find you."  
  
That was indeed the most logical conclusion. Sunny would have loved to believe that he regained his senses thanks to the power of friendship — after all, Kai had managed to return him from the mire of Shadow Dance by reminding him of those he cared about — but he knew that something more was at play here.  
  
This place, Mirage City, was no mere illusion. It was fantasy made reality, fueled by the fantastical power of the Demon of Imagination. It was no less real than any other place in the Dream Realm, and what Sunny had escaped from was not merely a delusion — it was the sorcery of a daemon.  
  
No matter how highly he thought of himself, he knew he was not powerful enough to overcome the will of Mirage, the Demon of Imagination. Instead, he had regained his sense of self through a mechanism built by her into the Great Mirror.  
  
Effie grinned.  
  
"Oh! It's nice to know that I have some authority here… not that I feel very authoritative. I don't think that I can control this place freely — nothing I tried really worked until now. It's as if something is blocking my way."  
  
Sunny looked at her darkly.  
  
"Well, naturally. After all, someone has stolen your… let's call it administrator rights."  
  
She pursed her lips, pouting, then gave Sunny an inquisitive look.  
  
"Darn thieves! What do we do, then? "  
  
He shrugged.  
  
"Isn't it obvious? Find the bastard, get your control of the Component back, find what I am looking for, and get the hell out of here."  
  
Sunny thought for a bit, and then added in a morose tone:  
  
"Of course, it won't be very easy. Because we must achieve all that… while playing the roles of a jaded detective who doesn't play by the rules and his perky young partner flawlessly…"